

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 ISLAMA 09232 01 OF 02 061433Z

45

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2299

INFO AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 9232

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PK

SUBJECT: KHAR'S DEFECTION: THE VIEW FROM ISLAMABAD

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 8929

B. LAHORE 1134

C. LAHORE 1147

D. KARACHI 2135 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: AS SEEN FROM ISLAMABAD, G. M. KHAR'S DEFECTION FROM THE PPP AND HIS ATTACK ON BHUTTO'S LEADERSHIP IS THE FIRST CHALLENGE OF ITS KIND DIRECTED AT THE PRIME MINISTER, AND IS BEING TAKEN MORE SERIOUSLY THAN OTHER DEFECTIONS IN THE PAST. KHAR'S BOLT DID NOT COME AS A SURPRISE: FOR HIM TO HAVE DONE OTHERWISE AFTER BHUTTO DENIED HIM THE PPP LAHORE BY-ELECTION NOMINATION WOULD HAVE SEVERELY UNDERCUT THE POLITICAL SUPPORT HE ENJOYS IN THE PUNJAB AND LARGELY FINISHED HIM AS A CREDIBLE POLITICAL FORCE THERE. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP BHUTTO HAS PRACTICED THE PM DECIDED THAT GIVING KHAR THE TICKET WOULD INTER ALIA BE INTERPRETED AS AN UNACCEPTABLE SIGN OF WEAKNESS. THE DEFECTION OF KHAR AND HIS FOLLOWERS IS THE FIRST SIZEABLE BOLT FROM PPP RANKS. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT
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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 09232 01 OF 02 061433Z

THAN THE NUMBERS NOW INVOLVED AS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN IS

THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE DEFECTION COULD EVENTUALLY
GATHER STRENGTH AS A BROAD ANTI-BHUTTO MOVEMENT. KHAR

SEEMS TO BE PLAYING A LONGTERM GAME AND PROBABLY DOES
NOT EXPECT TO WIN THE OCTOBER 19 BE-ELECTION. BUT THE
RALLYING OF ANTI-BHUTTO SENTIMENT BEHIND HIM TO THE
POINT WHERE HE CAN GAIN CREDIBILITY AS A CHALLENGER TO
THE PM WILL BE A TALL ORDER FOR KHAR TO FILL. HE HAS
IMPORTANT ASSETS IN TERMS OF POPULAR AND POLITICAL
SUPPORT IN THE PUNJAB BUT THE OBSTACLES HE FACES ARE
FORMIDABLE. NOT LEAST AMONG THEM IS BHUTTO'S SKILL
AND EXPERIENCE. THE PRIMARILY PERSONAL MOTIVATION
INVOLVED IN KHAR'S DEFECTION HAS BEEN OBSCURED BY IDEO-
LOGICAL RHETORIC. WHILE OUR PRESENT JUDGEMENT IS THAT
BHUTTO REMAINS FIRMLY IN CONTROL WE BELIEVE THAT KHAR

AS A POSSIBLE CATALYTIC AGENT OF SENTIMENT AGAINST THE
PM DESERVES CAREFUL WATCHING. END SUMMARY.

1. GHULAM MUSTAFA KHAR'S DEFECTION FROM THE PPP, AND
HIS ATTACK ON BHUTTO'S LEADERSHIP (REPORTED IN REFTELS
A & B), IS THE FIRST CHALLENGE OF ITS KIND DIRECTED
AT THE PRIME MINISTER. OTHERS CLOSE TO BHUTTO HAVE
PREVIOUSLY LEFT OR BEEN FORCED OUT OF THE PARTY.
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE "OLD GUARD" SUCH AS MERAJ
MOHAMMAD KHAN, J. A. RAHIM AND MAHMUD ALI KASURI MADE
THEIR DISCONTENT KNOWN AFTER LEAVING THE PPP BUT HAVE
NEVER BEEN MORE THAN MINOR IRRITANTS TO BHUTTO. KHAR'S
DECISION TO CONFRONT THE PRIME MINISTER, ALTHOUGH
PRESENTLY NOT A SIGNIFICANT THREAT TO THE LATTER'S
POSITION, MUST NEVERTHELESS BE DISQUIETING TO HIM.

2. KHAR'S DEFECTION DID NOT COME AS A SURPRISE TO
POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN ISLAMABAD. FOR HIM TO HAVE
LOYALLY ACCEPTED THE PM'S DECISION TO AWARD THE PARTY'S
NOMINATION TO A LESS PROMINENT AND CONTENTIOUS FIGURE,
PERHAPS TO HAVE TAKEN ONE OF THE FEDERAL CABINET OR
AMBASSADORIAL POSITIONS HE CONTENTS WERE OFFERED HIM
(HIS CLAIMS ARE DENIED BY HIS OPPONENTS), WOULD HAVE
SEVERELY UNDERCUT THE POLITICAL SUPPORT HE ENJOYS IN
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 ISLAMA 09232 01 OF 02 061433Z

THE PUNJAB AND LARGELY FINISHED HIM AS A CREDIBLE
FORCE IN THE PROVINCE. IT WOULD HAVE SIGNIFIED TO HIS
ABANDONED FOLLOWERS AND TO THE REST OF PAKISTAN AN
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF HIS PART THAT HENCEFORTH ANY ROLE HE
WOULD PLAY IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS WOULD DEPEND COMPLETELY
ON THE PLEASURE OF THE PM.

3. THIS IS THE ROLE BHUTTO PREFERS FOR HIS SUPPORTERS.

IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S HIGHLY PERSONALIZED LEADERSHIP STYLE, PPP COLLEAGUES MUST NOT ONLY OWE THEIR POSITIONS TO THE LEADER BUT MUST BE SEEN TO DO SO. THE RESULT HAS BEEN FREQUENT CHANGES IN THE STANDING OF THE MEN AROUND THE PM. THOSE WHO SEEM TO HIM TO BE TAKING TOO INDEPENDENT A LINE OR DEVELOPING TOO SIGNIFICANT A POLITICAL BASE HAVE FALLEN INTO WELL PUBLICIZED DISFAVOR OR HAVE BEEN FORCED OUT OF OFFICE. LATER REHABILITATION ONLY SERVES TO UNDERSCORE THE PM'S POWER. ALTHOUGH THE BHUTTO-KHAR RELATIONSHIP, SEEMINGLY UNDERPINNED BY AN AFFECTIONATE MASTER/DISCIPLE TIE BETWEEN THEM, IS A DEEPER AND MORE COMPLICATED ONE THAN THOSE THE PM HAS WITH MOST OTHER SUPPORTERS, ITS MERCURIAL PATH LEADING TO CONFRONTATION HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCED BY THIS PATTERN. THE MOST RECENT OF ITS MANY TURNS WAS PROMPTED BY KHAR'S DEMAND THAT HE BE NAMED PPP CANDIDATE IN THE LAHORE BY-ELECTION. AS SEEN FROM ISLAMABAD, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STYLE OF LEADERSHIP HE HAS PRACTICED THE PM DECIDED THAT A FAVORABLE DECISION ON HIS PART WOULD HAVE BEEN SEEN AS A KNUCKLING UNDER TO KHAR, AN INVITATION TO FURTHER INTERNECINE DIFFICULTIES IN THE PROVINCIAL PARTY AND GOVERNMENT, AND A SUGGESTION THAT BHUTTO NEEDED KHAR ALMOST AS MUCH AS KHAR NEEDED THE PM. AS SUCH IT WAS PROBABLY AS UNACCEPTABLE TO BHUTTO AS THE ACCEPTANCE OF A NEGATIVE DECISION WAS TO KHAR.

4. KHAR'S DEFECTION IS BEING TAKEN MORE SERIOUSLY THAN OTHERS IN THE PAST. HE HAS A SOLID BASE OF BOTH POPULAR AND POLITICAL SUPPORT IN THE PUNJAB, INDEPENDENT OF HIS FORMER RELIANCE ON THE PPP. THIS STRENGTH IS INDICATED BY THE 18 PPP MEMBERS OF THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY AND FOUR IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHO ARE SUPPORTING HIS

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 ISLAMA 09232 01 OF 02 061433Z

CANDIDACY AND HAVE REPORTEDLY LEFT THE PARTY WITH HIM. ALTHOUGH FEW IN TERMS OF TOTAL NUMBERS (THERE WERE 169 PPP MEMBERS IN THE PUNJAB PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY AND 97 IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BEFORE KHAR BOLTED), IS IS THE FIRST

SIZEABLE DEFECTION FROM PPP RANKS.

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PAGE 01 ISLAMA 09232 02 OF 02 061424Z

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2300

INFO AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY

AMCONSUL KARACHI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 9232

5. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE NUMBERS NOW INVOLVED AS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE KHAR DEFECTION COULD EVENTUALLY GATHER STRENGTH AS A BROAD ANTI-BHUTTO MOVEMENT. HIS HAND FORCED BY THE PM. KHAR HIMSELF NOW SEEMS TO BE THINKING IN TERMS OF A LONGTERM STRUGGLE IN WHICH HE CAN OVER TIME WIN SUPPORT FROM THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME DISCONTENTED WITH BHUTTO, DISGRUNTLED WITH HIS POLITICAL MOVES AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS, UNHAPPY WITH HIS FAILURE TO FULFILL HIS CAMPAIGN PROMISES, OR FOR ANY NUMBER OF REASONS RECEPTIVE TO CHANGE. IN THIS CONTEXT, HE MAY SEE HIMSELF EVENTUALLY PLAYING THE SAME ROLE VIS-A-VIS BHUTTO AS BHUTTO PLAYED IN THE 1966-1969 CAMPAIGN TO OVERTHROW FIELD MARSHAL AYUB, A MOVEMENT WITH WHICH KHAR WAS OF COURSE INTIMATELY ASSOCIATED.

6. HE DOES NOT, IN ANY EVENT, APPEAR TO ENTERTAIN ANY SERIOUS EXPECTATION OF WINNING THE OCTOBER 19 BY-ELECTION. AS CONGEN LAHORE NOTES, THE PPP SUPPORTED BY THE PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION, THE PRESS, AND A NOT DISINTERESTED CIVIL SERVICE HAS STACKED THE CARDS IN FAVOR OF THE ELECTION OF THE PPP NOMINEE, LAHORE PARTY LEADER SHER MOHAMMAD BHATTI. KHAR, WHO ONCE RAN THE

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PAGE 02 ISLAMA 09232 02 OF 02 061424Z

MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT HIMSELF, IS PRESUMABLY NOT UNAWARE OF THE FORCES WHICH CAN BE MOBILIZED AGAINST HIM. HE HAS ALREADY ANNOUNCED THAT AFTER THE ELECTION

HE WILL CALL A MEETING OF HIS SUPPORTERS TO MAP A POLITICAL PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. MANY COMMENTATORS HERE ARE CONVINCED THAT HIS STRATEGY IS TO FOLLOW UP HIS SEEMINGLY INEVITABLE DEFEAT WITH A SERIES OF FURTHER BIDS: ACCORDING TO HIS SCHEME, REPORTED IN REFTEL B, HIS FOLLOWERS WILL RESIGN FROM THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY ONE BY ONE TO BRING ABOUT THE BY-ELECTIONS KHAR WILL CONTEST. IN THIS WAY, KHAR WILL HOPE OVER THE REMAINING YEAR OR SO LEADING TO NEXT WINTER'S GENERAL ELECTIONS TO GAIN ALMOST CONSTANT EXPOSURE AS THE FOCUS OF ANTI-BHUTTO ACTIVITY, IF NOT NATIONALLY THEN AT LEAST IN THE COUNTRY'S MOST POLITICALLY IMPORTANT PROVINCE.

7. THE RALLYING OF ANTI-BHUTTO SENTIMENT BEHIND HIM TO THE POINT WHERE HE CAN GAIN CREDIBILITY AS CHAL-

LENGER TO THE PM WILL BE A TALL ORDER FOR KHAR TO FILL. IS IT TRUE THAT HE HAS IMPORTANT ASSETS IN TERMS OF POPULAR AND POLITICAL SUPPORT IN THE PUNJAB, APPARENTLY NOT ONLY AMONG HIS OWN RURAL GENTRY AND THEIR FOLLOWERS BUT ALSO AMONG MIDDLE AND LOWER MIDDLE CLASS URBAN ELEMENTS. HE HAS AND IS APPARENTLY WILLING TO USE AS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN HIS ACTIVITIES THE POTENTIALLY POWERFUL (AND DANGEROUS) PLANK OF PUNJABI REGIONALISM. THERE ARE PERSISTENT RUMORS THAT HE ENJOYS SUPPORT IN THE MILITARY. YET THE OBSTACLES TO HIS APPARENT EFFORT TO POSE AN EVENTUAL CHALLENGE TO BHUTTO ARE FORMIDABLE. HE FACES IN THE PM ONE OF THE MOST ASTUTE POLITICAL PRACTITIONERS PAKISTAN HAS PRODUCED, AND ONE WHO HAS IN THE PAST SHOWN HIMSELF PREPARED TO USE WHATEVER STEPS HE BELIEVES NECESSARY TO DISARM POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS RIVAL GROUPINGS. HIS REPUTATION AND IMAGE, PART FEUDAL LANDLORD, PART POLITICAL BULLY BOY, IS UNATTRACTIVE TO MANY. HIS IDENTIFICATION WITH RIGHTIST ELEMENTS ALIENATES MANY IN A POOR COUNTRY WHERE LEFTIST SLOGANS AND PROGRAMS ARE POPULAR. HIS PRESENT CHAMPIONSHIP OF PUNJABI RIGHTS, PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY AND PUNJABI

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ISLAMA 09232 02 OF 02 061424Z

CLAIMS TO A GREATER NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT POSITIONS MAY HAVE SOME APPEAL IN HIS HOME PROVINCE, BUT IT IS NOT THE BEST PATH TO ACHIEVE A NATIONAL CONSTITUENCY AND CAN ONLY ADD TO THE MANIFOLD SUSPICIONS OF THE PUNJABIS FELT IN THE OTHER THREE PROVINCES. EFFORTS ON HIS PART, ALREADY BEING REPORTED, TO WORK UP SOME FORM OF COOPERATION OR COALITION WITH OTHER OPPOSITION ELEMENTS ARE LIKELY TO BE HAMPERED BY HIS PAST RECORD OF REPRESSION AGAINST HIS OPPONENTS. HOWEVER, GIVEN THE

INTEREST OF MANY OPPOSITION LEADERS IN WORKING WITH ANY NEW RECRUIT AND EARLIER EVIDENCE OF PAK MARRIAGES OF POLITICAL CONVENIENCE, SOME MEASURE OF SUCCESS CANNOT BE RULED OUT.) SINCE EARLY SUCCESS SEEMS UNLIKELY, WE ALSO QUESTION KHAR'S ABILITY TO SUSTAIN AND EXPAND A MOVEMENT WHICH AT LEAST IN ITS INITIAL STAGE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN PROMPTED BY A DESIRE FOR POWER AND ONLY SECONDARILY INFLUENCED BY ANY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS OTHER THAN DEMAGOGIC APPEALS TO PUNJABI PROVINCIALISM AND CYNICAL DEMANDS FOR A GREATER DEGREE OF DEMOCRACY.

8. AS IS OFTEN THE CASE IN PAKISTANI POLITICS, THE PERSONAL REASONS FOR POLITICAL DIFFERENCES ARE OBSCURED BY IDEOLOGICAL RHETORIC. SO IT IS WITH KHAR'S DEFECTION. THE CONTENTION OF THIS MESSAGE THAT IT WAS PRIMARILY MOTIVATED BY PERSONAL REASONS IS DENIED BY SOME POLITICAL COMMENTATORS, WHO CLAIM THAT KHAR'S ACTIONS WERE A DIRECT RESULT OF THE LEFT/RIGHT SPLIT IN THE PPP. THE PARTY LOYALISTS WHO ARE STRIDENTLY CRITICIZING KHAR ARE ACCUSING THE FORMER GOVERNOR OF BEING AN AGENT OF LANDLORDS, VESTED INTERESTS AND OTHER RIGHTIST FORCES. THE MORE LEFTIST ELEMENTS IN THE PARTY, ANTI-KHAR AND SUSPICIOUS OF HIS WEALTHY LANDLORD BACKGROUND, ARE DECLARING HIS DEPARTURE AS A VICTORY FOR "SOCIALISM" AND HAVE WELCOMED IT. AS SEEN FROM ISLAMABAD, HOWEVER, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ATTACKS ON KHAR BY THE SMALL BUT VOCAL LEFTIST GROUP IS MUCH

DILUTED BY EVIDENCE THAT THOSE DENOUNCING KHAR ARE BY NO MEANS EXCLUSIVELY LEFTISTS. (INDEED, JUST ABOUT CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 ISLAMA 09232 02 OF 02 061424Z

EVERYONE IS GETTING INTO THE ACT IN WHAT SEEMS TO US A MISCALCULATION WHICH HAS GIVEN KHAR MUCH MORE PUBLICITY THAN HE WOULD OTHERWISE GARNER.) THE PUNJAB PARTY AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF KHAR CONTINUES TO INCLUDE THE WIDE SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL FORCES IT HAS COME TO COMPRISE.

9. WHILE OUR PRESENT JUDGMENT IS THAT BHUTTO REMAINS FIRMLY IN CONTROL, WE BELIEVE THAT KHAR AS A POSSIBLE CATALYTIC AGENT OF SENTIMENT AGAINST THE PM DESERVES WATCHING. THE EMBASSY AND CONSTITUENT POSTS WILL BE CLOSELY FOLLOWING HIS MOVEMENT AND SUCH OTHER EVIDENCE OF PROBLEMS IN THE PPP AS THE ACTIVITIES OF SENATOR HANIF RAMAY, WHOSE IMPORTANT RECENT PRESS CONFERENCE STATEMENT (REFTEL C) WAS AT LEAST PARTLY RELATED TO KHAR'S BOLT. CONGEN LAHORE WILL BE PREPARING ITS OWN ASSESSMENT AS VIEWED FROM THE PRINCIPAL CENTER OF ACTIVITY.

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